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ABSTRACT

The Collier Country (Florida) Sheriff's Office has initiated a voluntary career development program for law enforcement and corrections officers holding ranks of lieutenant and below. The career development program is implemented through a systems approach that integrates career planning and individual assessment with performance evaluation, training, education, and compensation. The program's desired outcomes are to increase job satisfaction, improve levels of performance, and promote a healthier organizational climate. All program participants receive individual and group counseling, and all participating supervisors attend 2-day career development and performance evaluation workshops that emphasize supervisors' roles/responsibilities in providing technical and career information and serving as mentors. Participants also undergo an extensive assessment program that includes batteries of tests and self- and peer assessments. The curriculum consists of four core components: academic endeavors; community service; physical fitness; and firearms proficiency. The fifth component, job rotation/special assignment, may also be offered by special arrangement. A system of monetary rewards that is distinct from the agency's eight-step salary schedule is used to reward officers for participating in the program. To date, interest in the career development program has been highest among younger deputies with fewer than 5 years at the agency. (MN)

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DESIGN AND ASSESSMENT OF A CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

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Overview

An increasing number of law enforcement agencies are being confronted with a new set of concerns voiced by recruits just out of the law enforcement academy as well as a growing number of experienced law enforcement officers--concerns related to a guaranteed, systematic plan for career development, linked to a commitment by the law enforcement agency to chart a realistic promotional career path. To address these and other changing workforce demands, such as job enrichment and task specialization, the Collier County (Florida) Sheriff's Office has initiated a voluntary career development program for law enforcement and corrections officers holding ranks of lieutenant and below.

The planning process for the effort started in January 1991, with an examination of the standards relating to career development and higher education which are required for accreditation by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement. At that time this writer was asked by Sheriff Don Hunter to formulate a career development delivery plan that would combat stagnation within the ranks and also satisfy all standards related to accreditation. The decision was made to design a core curriculum which would be responsive to broad groups of job-families in both law enforcement and corrections and would provide an array of experiences to facilitate career and personal development. Thus, the desired goal of the program is to provide the agency with more "generalists" and to create individual career paths that would have some predictability for advancement.

Over the next two years a comprehensive program for career development was formulated together with an activity and time flow schedule. Job task analyses were completed for all positions at the agency; a training needs analysis was accomplished; a physical fitness policy was implemented, and a new firearms range was planned with construction now underway. A detailed promotional and transfer policy was also implemented which required specific efforts relating to the career development and training prior to lateral transfer or promotion to higher ranks.

The program's multipurposes were to attract, develop and retain highly qualified personnel to meet present and future agency staffing needs, and to provide deputies with opportunities to maximize their individual career goals and aspirations. The program also provides participants with a broad spectrum of assessment information on their knowledge, skills, and abilities so that they may set realistic career goals for short- and long-range planning efforts.

The Career Development Program is implemented through a systems approach which integrates career planning and individual assessment with performance evaluation, training, education and compensation. The desired outcomes are to increase job satisfaction, improve levels of performance, and promote a healthier organizational climate which responds to, and advances, the law enforcement and corrections officer as well as benefiting the agency.

The criteria to participate in the program is kept as simple as possible: have a performance evaluation rating of at least "acceptable" for the two prior six-month periods, have no documented evidence of "probationary status" for one prior year, and have no suspensions, for any reason, for one prior year. Each participating deputy also has to meet the minimum passing requirements of the first baseline tests in physical fitness and has to reach the minimum requirements for firearms qualification for the last qualifying period.

Any law enforcement or corrections officer who wishes to participate in the program receives individual and group career counseling. All supervisors (sergeants, lieutenants and captains) participate in a two-day career development workshop and a two-day performance evaluation workshop. Both activities outline the roles and responsibilities of supervisors in providing technical and career information as well as methods and techniques of career counseling. The role of the supervisor as a possible mentor is also heavily stressed. A supervisor's career development handbook was developed to assist in the task.

As a basis for career development analysis, all participants undergo an extensive assessment program utilizing batteries of tests together with self and peer assessments. Individual potential for advancement is integrated with future agency direction and long-term goals. Within the past year all sergeants, lieutenants and captains have taken the Leatherman Leadership Questionnaire which assesses 27 dimensions of leadership. Individual scores were compared to a national sample of 1000 law enforcement officers and to over 40,000 others from business and other professional fields.

The data gained from this assessment have provided valuable input for the latest training needs analysis. The data have also been beneficial for making rational selections of out-of-agency consultants, providing direction for in-house training, and for making cooperative agreements with local colleges and universities to offer specialized courses.

An important fact continually being emphasized throughout the program is that the individual bears the prime responsibility for his/her own career development. Basic career and job information is provided through routine updating and examination of job task analyses which are available for all positions in the organization.

Information about future agency direction is shared openly with those who choose to participate in the program. The agency's aim is to provide each participant with an effective career development model which enables the deputy to reach full capacity.

The Career Development Program

Four core components comprise the career development effort for all deputies. The components are Academic Endeavors, Community Service, Physical Fitness and Firearms Proficiency. A fifth component, Job Rotation/Special Assignment, may be selected in some cases when specific arrangement can be made. Each component is viewed as playing an important role in the future career development of any law enforcement or corrections officer. The experiences derived from participation in the program are designed to provide for future agency leadership positions as well as individual deputy personal growth and financial reward.

Evaluation for each component of the program is accomplished through a Portfolio Evaluation Committee. The deputy is responsible for preparing a portfolio of accomplishments in the component areas. The portfolio is prepared with the aid of the immediate supervisor or mentor, and the Career Development Counselor. It is presented and defended before a committee of four persons from within the agency and one from out of the agency.

The agency committee members consist of one member chosen by the deputy from the deputy's peer group, one member from a division other than the deputy's division, one lieutenant or captain from the deputy's division, and one additional deputy at any rank chosen by the Sheriff or Undersheriff. The out-of-agency person may be a certified law enforcement or corrections officer from another agency, or a civilian from the community.

Academic Endeavors

Under the academic portion of the program the deputy must enroll in two of four forty-hour core curriculum courses which are designed each year by the Training Unit. The courses are intended to supplement the agency's existing training program. Two of the courses are developed around high liability areas such as high-speed pursuit, defensive tactics or use of force, but courses may also be developed which are concerned with social issues such as cultural diversity or domestic violence. The other two address selected areas of management and leadership. The courses are usually taught by out-of-agency consultants, but may be taught by in-house trainers with special expertise on a topic. The courses may require research papers, case presentations and a formal final evaluation. Each deputy must maintain a notebook on the course for future evaluation by the Portfolio Committee. This portion of the career development program may be taken on agency time.

The second part of the academic component consists of any two of the following options:

1. Satisfactorily completing two prior-approved community college or university classes (6-8 semester hours) related to the deputy's career goal, and obtaining a grade of "B" or better. Courses must be taken off duty, and are fully reimbursed by the agency if taken at a state college or state university, or are reimbursed at one-half the tuition rate if taken at a regionally accredited private institution.

2. Successfully completing 80 hours of in-house training seminars and/or verified out-of-agency training at seminars sponsored by providers such as community colleges, Florida Department of Law Enforcement, FBI, or the International Association of Chiefs of Police. Upon completion of the training, the deputy must provide evidence to the Portfolio Committee that the training related to specific career goals. The deputy may also be asked to report to the committee orally regarding the experiences gained. This training may be taken on- or off-duty.

3. Successfully completing 100 hours of previously approved and verified self-paced instruction on such topics as management, team building, project management, planning, or other related topics. The Training Unit has a library of such materials from the American Management Association, Career Track, Florida Sheriff's Association, American Correctional Association and several other sources. Evaluation of quality of effort and attainment is determined by the instruction provider when possible, the Career Development Counselor and the Portfolio Committee. This training is taken off-duty.

4. Successfully completing 80 hours of verified Florida Department of Law Enforcement-sponsored incentive courses if the deputy has reached his/her maximum of incentive pay ($120-$130 per month). No course may be a repeat of a previously completed course, and all participants must maintain a comprehensive notebook and undergo an oral examination of information gained in the course. The training may be take on- or off-duty.

Community Service

The Community Service component consists of forty hours of community service within one year. The service must be approved and verified by the Career Development Counselor and is evaluated by the deputy's Portfolio Committee. A paper is required which documents and explains in detail the community service effort and how this effort advances the deputy's career goals. Examples include speeches before community groups, involvement with Big Brother/Big Sisters, Guardian Ad Litem participation, or coaching Little League. The number and variety of experiences possible for this component are limitless. Community service may be done on-or off-duty.

Physical Fitness

The level of attainment in physical fitness is dependent upon an individually established baseline which is obtained at the yearly agency-wide fitness evaluation and medical check-up. All fitness evaluations are governed by the guidelines established by the agency's fitness policy and are evaluated by the Fitness Coordinator and the Portfolio Committee. Fitness training is done on- or off-duty.

Firearms Proficiency

The level of attainment in firearms proficiency is dependent upon an individually established baseline and goals set forth by the agency and the Range Officer. The deputy is evaluated by the Range Officer, who provides a detailed yearly report to the Portfolio Committee. Proficiency is determined by accuracy, number of weapons in which proficiency is held, and the ability to analyze critical shoot situations under pressure. Training is done on- or off-duty.

Job Rotation/Special Assignment

From time to time, participation in task force situations and special assignments may become available within or out of the agency. Out-of-agency assignments are now possible with the Drug Enforcement Agency, U.S. Customs and other local law enforcement agencies. If these experiences are deemed important to a deputy's career goal, the Career Development Counselor, together with the deputy's supervisor, may recommend to the Portfolio Committee a substitution for a portion of experiences required in the academic component.

A minimum of a four- to six-week assignment in another unit or agency with on-the-job training and instruction is necessary for a substitution. Experiences derived from the assignment must be specifically set forth in a plan to be executed by the deputy, the Career Development Counselor and the unit supervisor in the area of the job rotation or special assignment. A detailed record of required experiences is submitted to the Portfolio Committee together with a written evaluation by the unit supervisor responsible for providing the experiences.

Assessing Accomplishments

As previously mentioned, a portfolio evaluation committee of five has the responsibility of assessing the level of excellence obtained by each deputy who chooses to participate in the program. The Career Development Counselor and the deputy's supervisor or mentor are charged with providing assistance to the deputy in formulating a plan to reach a designated level of excellence as well as providing advice to accomplish desired goals.

To help ensure internal validity, each portfolio evaluation committee member is provided a manual outlining the goals of the program and the responsibilities of an evaluator. A two-hour orientation is provided by the Career Development Counselor. The manual is under continual revision as a result of input from committee members, and omissions and weaknesses observed by the career counselor. A checklist is provided each evaluator to ensure completeness when reviewing activities outlined in the Career Development Plan. An oral presentation rating sheet is also used to assess the quality of presentations given to the committee. A ten-minute training video is now in production which illustrates clips from interviews and examples of specific levels of excellence.

The evaluation portion of the career development effort may well prove to be the most difficult to manage because of time and scheduling. There, too, is some reluctance by deputies to be a peer reviewer. At present, though, there have been no complaints by participants with regard to the incremental validity of the evaluator groups.

The evaluation committee's decisions are considered final, but in the future a movement may be made towards a grievance procedure if there are numbers of deputies who believe the committee's decisions are flawed. All deputies are encouraged to review videotapes of their evaluation and to discuss the evaluation and the tapes with the supervisor or mentor and the Career Development Counselor.

The role of the Career Development Counselor has been an evolving one, and will continue to be so. Currently, providing advice, administering tests, obtaining materials, providing sources for information, and evaluating case studies and research papers have been primary. Also carefully validating documentation of experiences, and reviewing transcripts, course outlines, and educational achievement have been important to program success.

Monetary Rewards

Under the present compensation plan, the agency has an eight-step salary schedule for each rank from deputy to captain. The monetary rewards derived from participation in the career development program are separate and distinct from the eight-step salary schedule.

It is the responsibility of the deputy's Portfolio Committee to evaluate each of the components in the program on the basis of three "Levels of Excellence." This evaluation is the sole determining factor for the amount of merit compensation awarded to the deputy each year.

If the deputy receives an overall evaluation on the component at a "Level of Excellence" of one, or better, for each component, the deputy will be awarded a 3.5% merit increase for the year.

If the deputy receives an evaluation at a "Level of Excellence" of two, or better, for each component, an award of a 5% merit increase will be given for the year.

And, if the deputy receives a total evaluation at a "Level of Excellence" of three in all component areas, the award will be a 7.5% merit increase for the year.

All merit awards are granted after the end of the budget year (October 1) and are added to the deputy's first bi-monthly salary check after that date. The amount of merit increase does not become part of the deputy's base pay.

Summary

In general the interest level for the Career Development Program has been the highest for younger deputies, those with the agency for under five years.

This may change somewhat in the next year as a cooperative agreement has been signed between the district's law enforcement academy and the local community college. The college can now grant credits for courses in criminal justice which relate to classroom hours in specific subject areas which were taken while at the law enforcement academy, and can also grant credits for hours taken in courses sponsored by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. The cooperative agreement should attract older deputies as they may receive up to forty college credits for courses related to criminal justice. This program should also encourage many older deputies to finish the 2-year degree.

Additionally, a number of the older deputies (ten to fifteen years of experience) have reported they feel more energized through their roles as mentors. This has become evident through a more positive team spirit being shown at some sub-stations and in some specialized units.

The fitness component has also produced some positive results through weight loss and better eating habits which have been encouraged as part of the program.

The firearms component should, too, get a big lift next year with the completion of a new facility and range which will be more responsive to a more comprehensive program.

And lastly, but perhaps most important, the agency's college and minority recruitment programs have seen positive benefits from the efforts in career development. The career development program has become the top-selling feature for the agency and has resulted in attracting a large number of high quality young deputies.